

Kennesaw Mountain

Kennesaw Mountain
National Battlefield Park
Georgia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, by Thure de Thulstrup.

Atlanta was too important a place in the hands of the enemy to be left undisturbed, with its magazines, stores, arsenals, workshops, foundries, and more especially its railroads, which converged there from the four great cardinal points.

William T. Sherman

Campaign for Atlanta By the spring of 1864 the Confederacy was weakening and the mighty war power of the Union was at last being employed. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, recently promoted to military commander-in-chief, ordered a concerted offensive by all Union armies. His orders to Gen. William T. Sherman at Chattanooga, Tenn., were to attack the Confederate army in Georgia, "break it up, and go into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can upon their war resources."

Sherman's 100,000 men and 254 pieces of artillery departed their encampments south and east of Chattanooga during the first week in May. Confronting them along Rocky Face Ridge, near Dalton in the mountains of northwest Georgia, were Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's 65,000 Confederates with 187 cannon. Although Confederate authorities wanted Johnston to march north into Tennessee, the campaign quickly devolved into a contest for Atlanta, railroad hub and war manufacturing and storage center for the Confederacy.

Sherman approached Rocky Face with two-thirds of his men on May 9, while the rest

marched 15 miles southward through Snake Creek Gap, threatening the Western & Atlantic Railroad. Johnston's vital supply connection with Atlanta, Johnston hastily retreated and dug in at Resaca, where, on May 13-15, the Confederates repulsed Sherman's attacks. Johnston, however, fell back after a Union column crossed the Oostanaula River and again threatened the railroad.

Time and again the same strategic situation was repeated. Whenever Sherman found the Confederates entrenched in strong positions, he would attempt to hold them in place with part of his force while dispatching another portion behind their flank, attempting to cut the Western & Atlantic. Johnston retired backwards to intercept the threats. By late May he had pulled back to an impregnable position in the Allatoona Mountains, Sherman swung wide to the southwest, but Johnston, alert to Union movements, sidestepped to meet him with stubborn fighting at New Hope Church on May 25. Pickett's Mill on May 27, and at Dallas on the 28th. Sherman then returned to the railroad at Acworth, while Johnston took position across Lost, Pine, and Brushy Mountains.

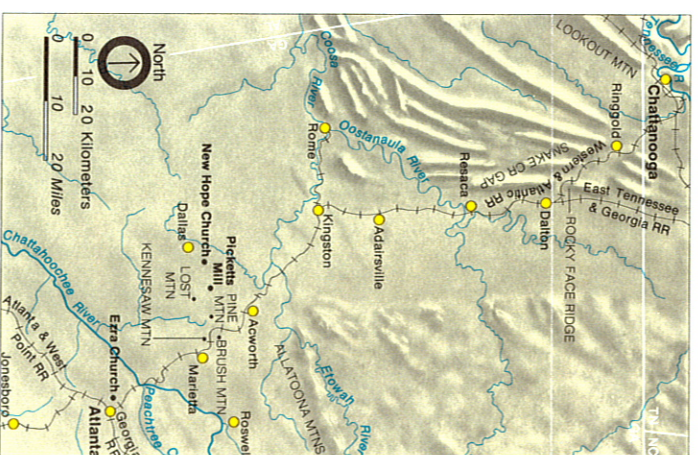
Battle at Kennesaw Sherman resumed his advance on June 10. A southwestward twist of the railroad forced him to operate south and west of Marietta so as not to endanger his own supply line. By June 19, although hampered by weeks of continual rain, Sherman's troops had forced Johnston to withdraw again, this time to a prepared defensive position anchored by Kennesaw Mountain, a lofty humped ridge with rocky slopes rising above the surrounding plain. Confederate engineers had laid out a formidable line of entrenchments covering every approaching ravine or hollow with cannon and rifle fire.

Again Sherman extended his lines to the south to get around the Confederate flank. Johnston countered by shifting 11,000 men under Gen. John Bell Hood to meet the threat. At Kolb's Farm on June 22 Hood struck savagely but unsuccessfully. His attack failed to drive the Northerners away, but it did temporarily check their southward extension.

Stalemated and immobilized by muddy roads, Sherman suspected that the Confederate lines, although very strong, might be thinly held and that one sharp thrust might break through and destroy the entire Southern army.



The Atlanta Campaign



and Benjamin Franklin Cheatham. Most of those in the assault waves were shot down. Some got to close quarters and for a few minutes there was brutal hand-to-hand fighting on top of the defenders' earthworks. Both sides grimly nicknamed this place the "Dead Angle."

The Northerners lost 3,000 men, the Confederates 800. Ironically the diversionary movement on the Confederate left seized an important road intersection that placed Sherman closer to the Chattahoochee River crossings than Johnston. Sherman resumed his flanking strategy, and the Southerners abandoned their Kennesaw lines during the night of July 2.